





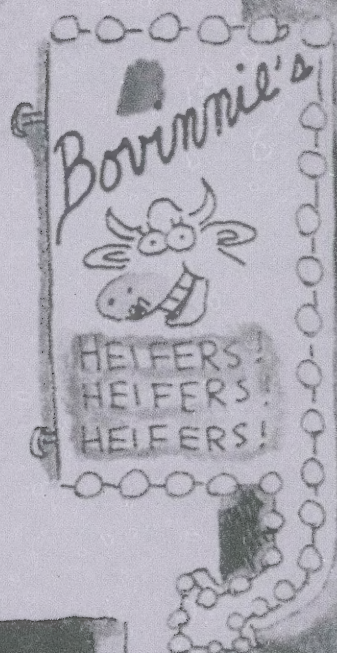




Isabella







Lulu Jones  
has hoof  
and mouth  
Lanson



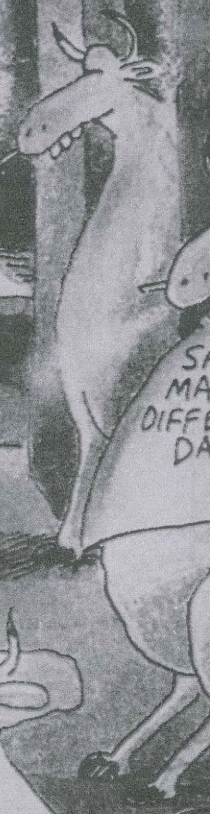
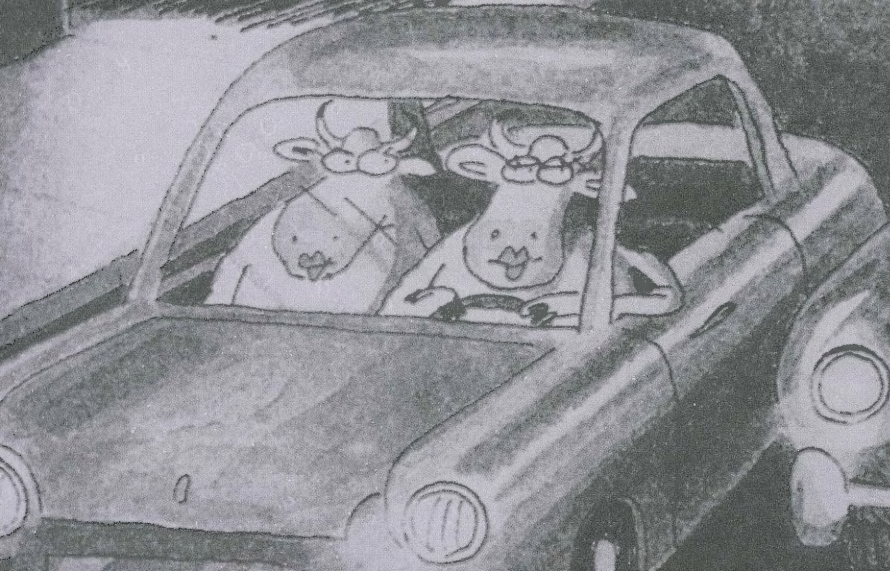
THE  
COW CATCHER



EAT  
HAY  
& DIE

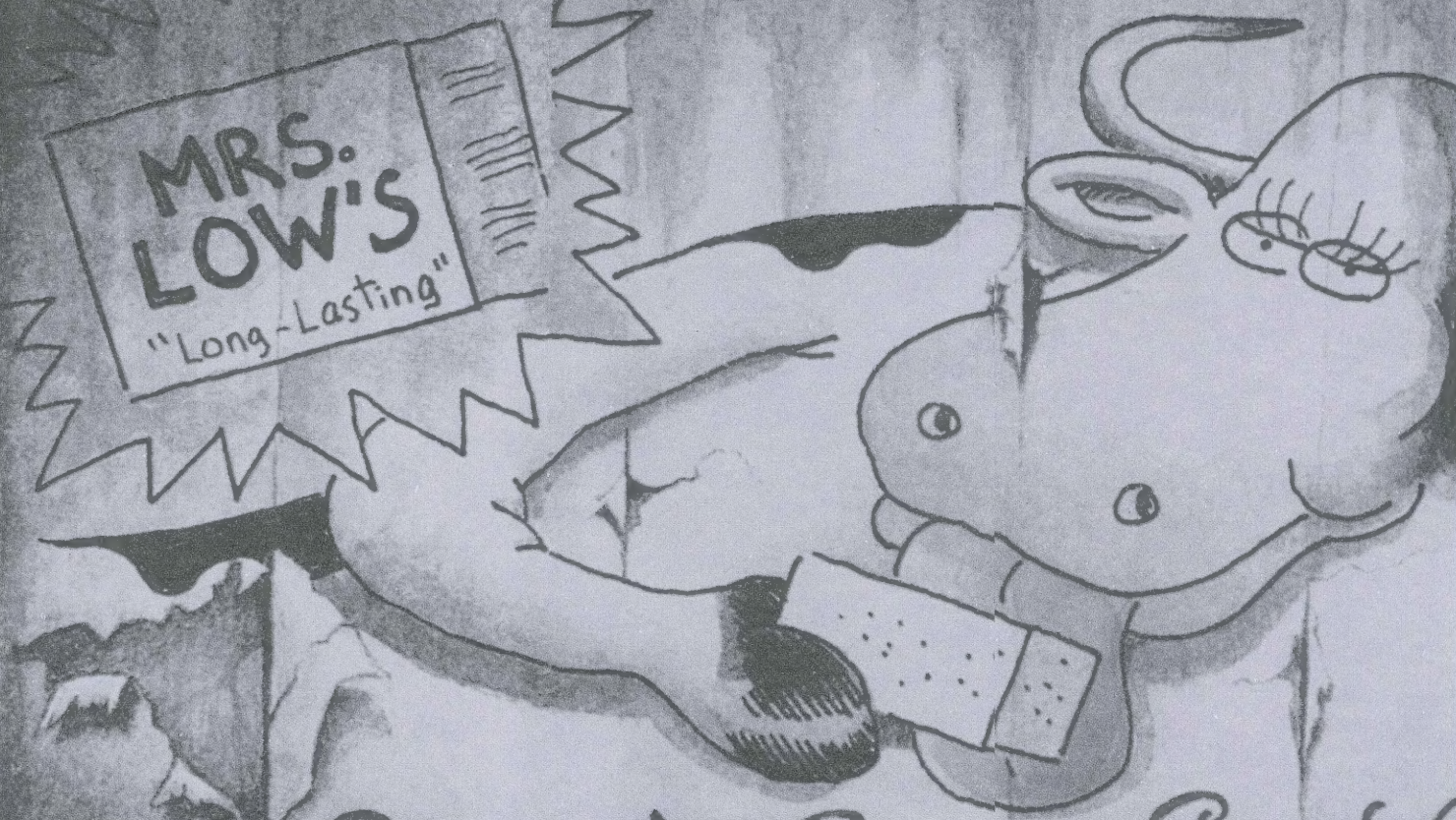
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PLACE





MRS.  
LOW'S  
"Long-Lasting"

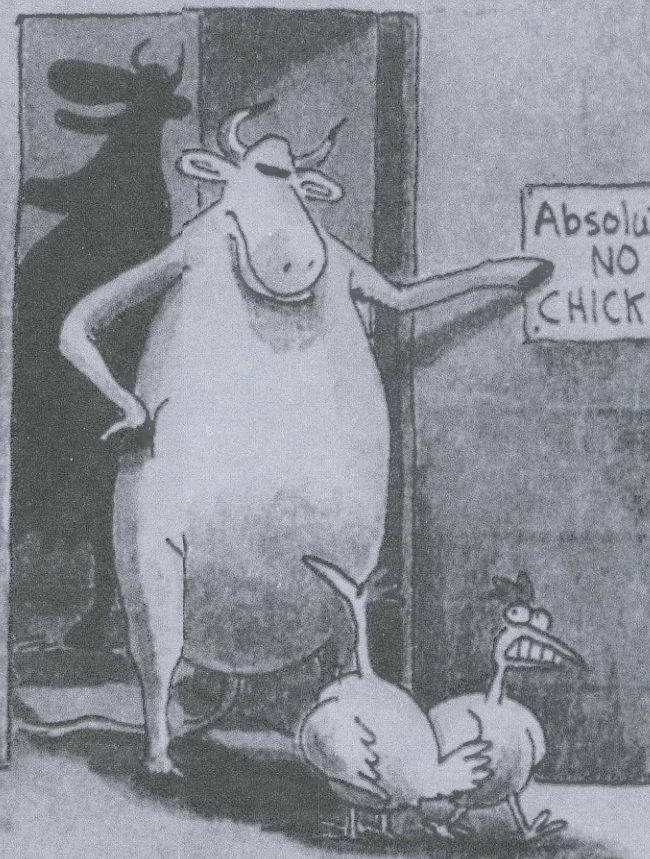
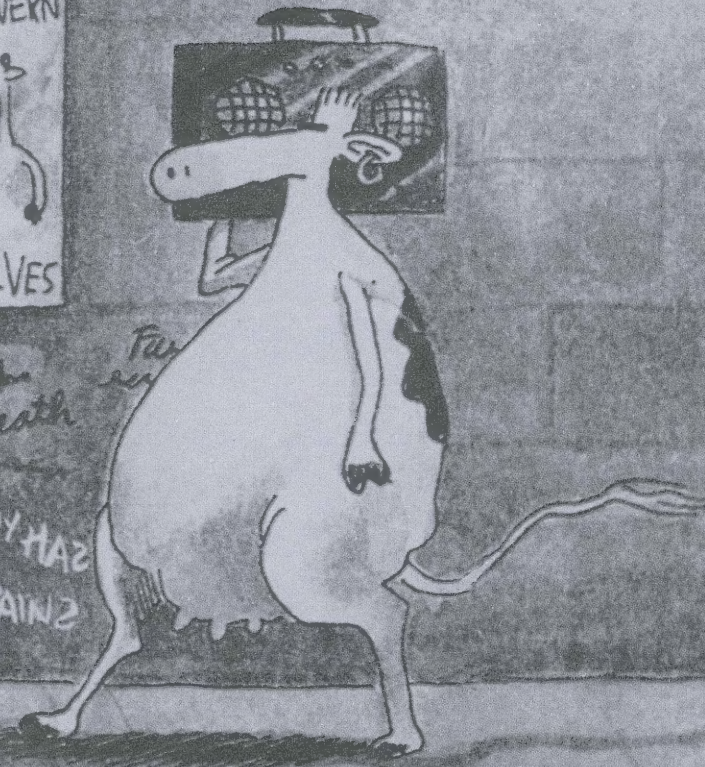


Try Mrs. Low's Salt L

Club  
Cud Club  
Cud

APPEARING  
AT THE  
BLOWFLY TAVERN  
THE  
DEATH CALVES

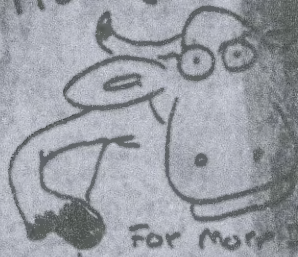
Judy Mac the  
alfalfa breath  
FRANK MOODY HAZ  
OATS FOR BRAINS







It's Everyb  
Problem!



For more information

Licks

The Moo  
Note

THE WAX  
BUTCHER  
MUSEUM

MRS. O'LEARY'S  
COW  
1859-1871

Absolutely  
NO  
CHICKENS.

Bob Feller  
sucks on  
electric fence

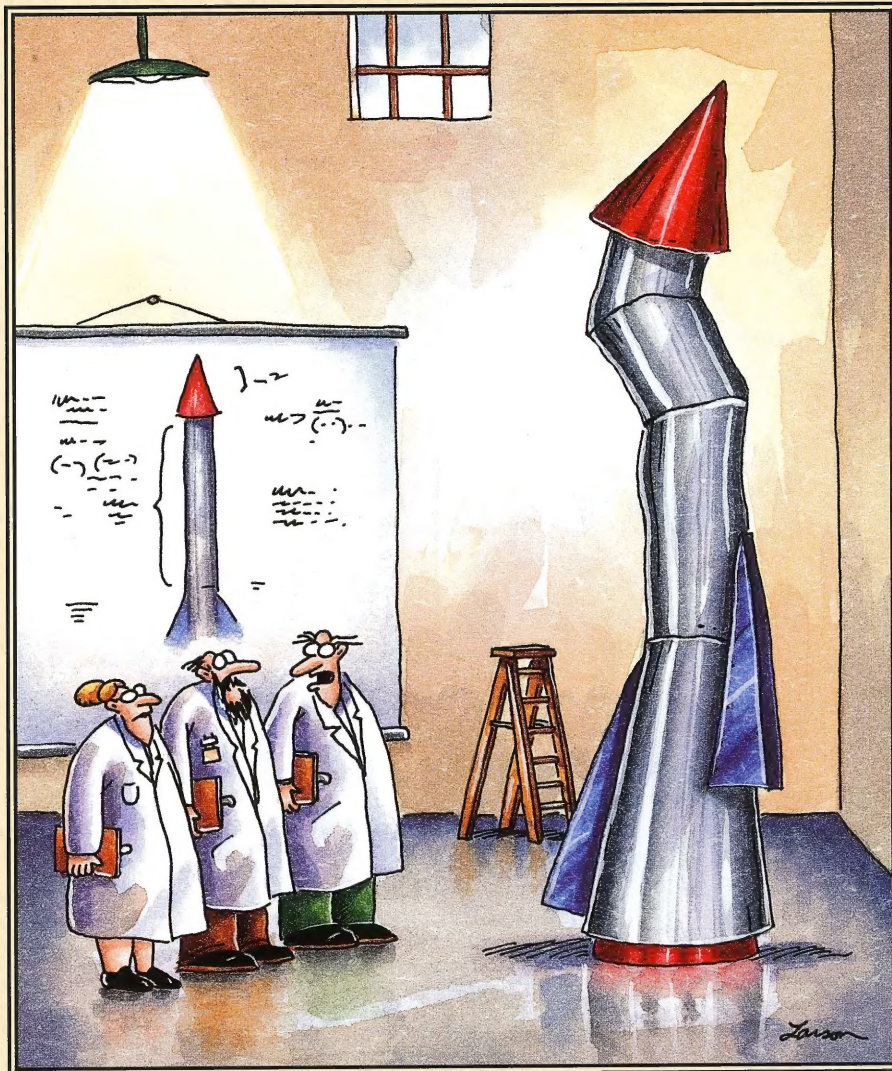
Pat's Cow  
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THE  
COMPLETE  
FAR SIDE

VOLUME ONE  
1980-1984





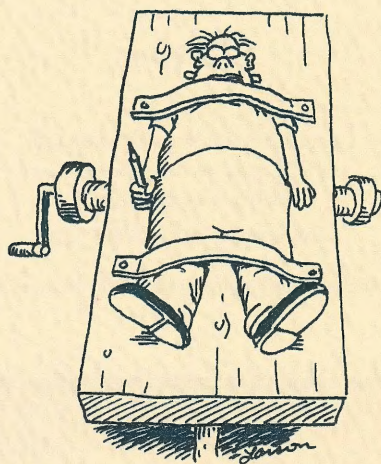
"It's time we face reality, my friends. ...  
We're not exactly rocket scientists."



# THE COMPLETE FAR SIDE

VOLUME ONE  
1980-1984

Gary Larson



Andrews McMeel Publishing  
an Andrews McMeel Universal company  
Kansas City



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# FOREWORD

By Steve Martin



## Different Beginnings for Gary Larson Essay

I am sorry to report, given the occasion of this very important publication, that many of the scenes depicted in this book are actually false. Several years ago I began to suspect the veracity of a few of the events portrayed by Larson. "Wait a minute," I thought. "A chicken couldn't confess to murdering Old MacDonald: Old MacDonald was a *fictitious* character." It was a small thought that grew to a big one: Was Gary Larson just making a lot of this stuff up? Though many believe that chickens talk, does it necessarily follow that likewise so do ducks and dogs?



Gary Larson came to my house last weekend, and I was surprised to find that he is an insect. All this time I figured him for a bear or a little fat kid, but when he walked across my ceiling and hid in the drapes, I knew ...



## An Open Letter to Gary

Dear Gary,

Life does not come with little frames around it. Life is not topsy-turvy and surreal. Life is hard and it's not really funny when you make light of it. Have you ever read Schopenhauer? He thinks that death ...



I suppose Mr. Larson and others like him think it's funny to depict young boys standing on top of a flattened dog. This attempt at "humor" actually teaches and encourages young boys to stand on top of flattened dogs. In fact, though I am not a young boy, I myself was tempted to stand on top of a flattened dog. But you know what? There are no flattened dogs where I live. There are, however, hundreds of cats who, though not flattened, are actually quite thin, and if laid on their side, would qualify as flattened. I'll guarantee that standing on them was not funny. Not really funny, not har-de-har-har funny, just mildly funny.



Gary Larson is the greatest living cartoonist OOPS sorry, Gary—make that greatest beheaded cartoonist ...





Gary Larson, born Garyisovich Larsonoffsky, the third son of a farmer and a duck, raised in Peking, swore when he saw his family being taken away and bean-fried by two pandas that he would move to the United States and make enough money so that one day he could return in triumph, though when he did make enough money, he thought, "Actually I'd prefer to lose all my money and return in defeat."



Many Larson scholars like to cite panel 108, caption 16, as proof of the existence of a deity. However, the exact nature of the deity is contradicted by several other panels. Scholars working at the Institute of Talking Dogs offer panel 247, with its image of two men standing on white clouds of heaven talking out of earshot of the deity, as proof of Larson's *theory of semi-omniscience*. In another panel depicting heaven, the newly deceased are issued harps, indicating a *benevolent un-musical mover*. However, the two men in the previous panel do not have harps, they have a gun. So how does a supreme being regarded as a *benevolent un-musical mover* fit into the *theory of semi-omniscience*, especially when the devil, who is handing out accordions, is revealed to be a blithe humorist (panel 42, caption 16)?



I'll bet Gary Larson's neighbors would say that Gary is very quiet:

"He kept to himself, never bothered anybody."

"And how did you feel when you found out he wrote *The Far Side*?"

"I was shocked. He seemed like such a nice guy."



Questions I would like to ask Gary Larson:

Who are you currently dating?

What's coming up in the future for a Gary Larson?

Are you crazy and nutty at home?

If you were in a strict foreign country run by zealots, and they demanded that you renounce your belief that humans can deflate like balloons and fly around the room, would you recant, escape, or die while being squeezed by red-hot pincers?

Hey Gary, what do you think?

Steve





# Introduction

by Jake Morrissey

*"Well, this started off innocently enough ..."*

—Gary Larson

My favorite Gary Larsons were never published. For the better part of a decade they sat at the bottom of a desk drawer, crammed into a tattered white envelope, forgotten by me and, no doubt, by Gary. I rediscovered them by chance one afternoon as I rifled through a drawer looking for something unrelated to *The Far Side*. The contents slipped out of the envelope and fell into my hand. It took a moment for me to recognize them and to realize what small wonders they are.

Wonders the size of a Post-it note.

Some of the most revealing work Gary Larson ever produced as a cartoonist can be found in the brief notes he stuck to his cartoons just before he sent them to Universal Press Syndicate, where I worked as his editor for the last 10 years



that he drew *The Far Side*. Every week, as his deadline loomed and the Federal Express driver hovered expectantly at his door, Gary would dash off last-minute comments about the cartoons he was sending me. Some of the notes suggested how he thought a caption could be improved; others wondered if a drawing would reproduce satisfactorily in newspapers. A couple even questioned whether a cartoon was funny at all. They were pithy, astute, and self-deprecating, but what I like best about them now is the insight they offer into the process of creating *The Far Side*. In a way, they are a peek behind the curtain.

I can offer no reasonable explanation for why I kept these notes—they certainly weren't written for the ages. I know I didn't keep all of them; usually I threw them away. But one day as Gary and I were talking on the phone, instead of throwing the note into the wastebasket, I stuffed it into a spare envelope. And so a habit was born.

*"I have no idea why I drew this or what it means,  
but compared to the **next** cartoon, it's very normal."*

Rereading Gary's notes, I am struck by how open he is to his own creativity, how willing he is to be guided by it. Several mention that his initial ideas for cartoons turned into (pupated?) panels that differed markedly from their inspiration. What continues to interest me about Gary Larson the cartoonist is *how* his methods differ from those of his peers. Many cartoonists begin with a gag, a punch line, and write toward it. Gary begins with the seed of an idea, which often doesn't feel traditionally funny, and then tends it a bit to see what takes root. What's so exceptional about *The Far Side* is that sometimes what sprouts isn't what anyone expects, least of all Gary: He plants what he thinks is a carrot and it turns out to be cabbage. It is this sense of not quite knowing how something will come out that makes *The Far Side* subversively exhilarating.



Cows ring doorbells. Monsters' eyes reflect in rearview mirrors. Praying mantises bicker over who devoured whose mate. Surprise may be a part of all humor, but in *The Far Side*, surprise, even astonishment, is the norm.

*"Jake: Your version was the best of all. (Damn it!)"*

Editing Gary's work can be tricky: "Improving" a vision as idiosyncratic as his without his input isn't easy, though there were editors who thought it was. "Just take the word out, nobody will get the damn thing anyway," a newspaper editor once said to me when he called to complain about the language in a



*Far Side* caption. What the editor didn't understand—or didn't care to understand—was how hard Gary works to get his art and his language just right. And I always kept in mind that readers turn to *The Far Side* for Gary's view of the universe, not mine, so my job was to help him

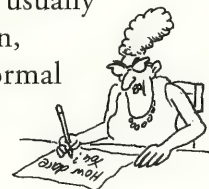
find in himself the best work he was capable of.

Early on, we settled into a working rhythm that served us well. Every Monday morning I received the next week's cartoons from Gary, and after going over them on my own I would call him. We would then discuss each cartoon, addressing the points he raised in the notes he attached, editing language or modifying art when we agreed it was necessary. He always knew where the true humor was in each panel—sometimes the best part of a cartoon was the reaction on a character's face, for example—and he knew when to stop fiddling with it, which some cartoonists can't do.

Gary is a rigorous, even ruthless, editor of his own work, writing and rewriting his captions so the flow of the words matches the cartoon's art and tone. He understands that the heart of a successful cartoon lies in the writing. Good writing can save bad art, but good art can never save bad writing. That is why Gary willingly reworked captions word by word to get them right. If you spend any time at all analyzing *Far Side* captions, you'll see that removing a word can ruin the rhythm and dilute the humor. We once had six different phone conversations in one day about a single word in a caption. (No, I won't tell you which cartoon; I invoke the cartoonist-editor privilege.)

His intriguing use of language also had unexpected benefits: Helping to decide the correct spelling of *luposlipaphobia* was a lot of fun for someone who likes to play with language. Saying the word aloud still makes me smile.

Finding the right order for the *Far Side* cartoons over the course of a week was as important as finding the right language in the captions. We tried to pace the cartoons based on our own admittedly idiosyncratic view of newspaper readership. We opened the week on Monday with what we thought was the funniest cartoon. Tuesday's was usually a little less strong, but Wednesday's had to be the second funniest, since newspapers in North America usually ran their coupons and food advertisements in that day's edition, which generally meant a fatter newspaper and a wider-than-normal readership. Thursday's cartoon was more often than not one of the week's strange cartoons, while Friday's and Saturday's were usually the oddest of the group—the ones we weren't





quite sure people would get but which we liked anyway. (The Sunday cartoons were another matter entirely.)

I make no claim that this was the most effective way to publish *The Far Side*; no doubt there are people who will find this system bizarre. But it suited us and *The Far Side*, since it seemed to mimic its readers' tastes and sensibilities.

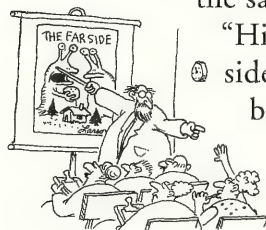


*"For the life of me, I can't pronounce let alone spell the word know[n] to every trumpet player. Omnisure? Ambrochure? Oxzfjghzx? What is it?"*

But still the questions came—sometimes before the cartoons were even published. In the days before the common use of the Internet, I was the one who hunted down the correct spellings of words that Gary wanted to use in his cartoons, words such as "embouchure," and more unusual phrases or names, such as "Puddin' Tame." I spent hours on the telephone over the years asking experts and librarians to give me the correct spellings of the strange words that popped up in *The Far Side*. I did not usually tell them why I was calling. I did once, but I flustered a librarian at the Kansas City Public Library so much that she told me to hang up and call the reference desk again. "I can't help someone I don't understand," she said, sounding a trifle panicked at the mere thought of *The Far Side*.

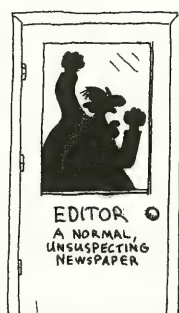
*"Not sure about the spelling of Honah-Lee. More importantly, this is a little obtuse. Do you get it, and did you get it right away? This is a test. Do not attempt to ask someon[e] else."*

As all cartoonists do, Gary draws inspiration from personal experience: his interests, his childhood memories, the world he sees on his way to play basketball. He is sensitive to the fact that his readers may have a different view of life, so we often discussed whether they would understand a particular cartoon and find it funny. A line from *Puff, the Magic Dragon*, for example: Would the millions of people around the world who read *The Far Side* recognize the references? As Gary's audience grew, so did the number of head-scratchers, those readers who didn't quite understand *The Far Side* every day. So some cartoons became a judgment call: Should we release a cartoon that not everyone would understand, or use one that more people might understand but that might not be as funny? More often than not, funny won out. So I became the guy who could explain every *Far Side* cartoon. I know that the praying mantis standing atop a gramophone in one cartoon is the only insect that can cock its head at the same angle as the RCA Victor dog could in the classic



"His Master's Voice" pose. And I am one of the few people outside Seattle and the cafés of Italy who knew what a "latte" was before Starbucks made it a ubiquitous part of the coffee experience. I fielded dozens of calls and letters from puzzled readers who thought that the cowboy who asked, "Latte, Jed?" was proposing a bizarre sexual frolic.





A week did not go by that I was not asked—by an editor, by a reader, by the media—to explain a particular *Far Side* cartoon. When I did, I invariably heard one of two reactions: a moment of silence at the other end of the phone and then a sudden “Aaaah, *now* I get it,” or a perturbed, “That’s the joke? That’s not funny.” I tried to explain to those disappointed souls that a cartoon usually isn’t funny when it has to be explained to you.

*“Would you mind responding to this guy on my behalf?  
I would just say you shared his comments with me,  
and that I offered my apologies for causing him any  
anger or concern ... and does he know how many  
dead babies it takes to—oh, forget the last part.”*

The thornier problems were those readers who understood a *Far Side* cartoon but didn’t like what they read and felt the need to express their indignation. Because Gary wants his work to speak for itself and was never comfortable discussing it, I was the first line of complaint for anyone who was offended by a *Far Side* cartoon. I became adroit at replying to a litany of protests about the cartoon: How it was anti-dog, anti-cat, and anti-God; how it was pro-torture, pro-Satan, and pro-violence against animals. None of this was true, of course, as I tried over and over to explain. I came to understand that what bothered people most about *The Far Side* was that they couldn’t predict where Gary would find his humor, and that can be disturbing. It always amused me that the cartoons that generated the most irate comments from people who found them reprehensible and morally bankrupt were exactly the same ones that other people indicated were their favorites.



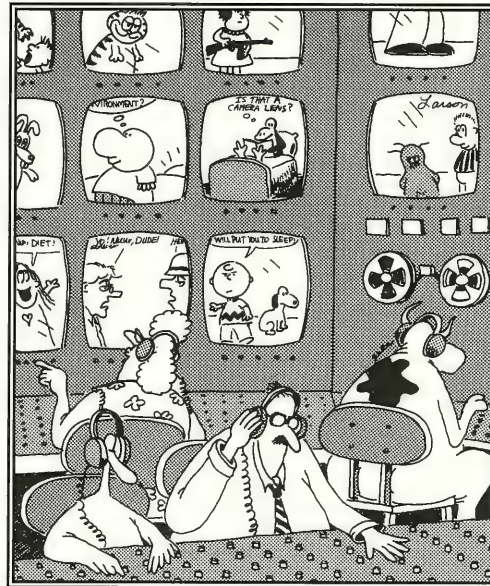
*“Originally, what made this thing funny to me, was the fact we couldn’t see the tarantula—suggesting where the hell is it? I still think that’s what makes this effective. Yet, last-minute stuff, I drew this one, big, hairy leg, making the humor less ‘sophisticated,’ I think, but maybe a more direct line to the funny bone? (It could easily be whited out at your end.) This would be a good question in the HATs. (Humor Aptitude Tests—I got 680.)”*

As painstaking as Gary is with his writing, he is just as careful about making his artwork unambiguous. Though he is the first to admit that his drawing style isn’t sophisticated, it shares a certain minimalist charm with the likes of classics such as *Krazy Kat*. Like *Krazy Kat*, the art of *The Far Side* is simple, even naive, but it’s comfortably free of the self-conscious, archcartooniness that characterizes so many comic strips. *The Far Side* doesn’t look slick or processed because it isn’t—because Gary never wanted it to look that way.



His choice of subject matter is just as personal. One of the more interesting subsets of *The Far Side* are the cartoons about cartooning itself. Several characters from other comic strips have appeared in *The Far Side*, notably Charlie Brown, Lucy, Garfield, and even Mark Trail, but I've always found the cartoons about the form more interesting. The characters understand they are in a cartoon and that they are being watched. This conceit makes fun of the idea of *being* a cartoon, an unusual conceit for newspaper comics pages when these first appeared. Over the years Gary has used this technique sparingly but to great effect. And the idea stayed with him: The final two *Far Side* cartoons that appeared on January 1, 1995, were both about cartooning and Gary's role as a cartoonist.

Sometimes I am asked if I think these are the "best" *Far Side* cartoons. I do admit to having a special affection for several others. One mad-scientist cartoon mentions a "Dr. Morrissey" who creates a hideous beast with the nine heads of the Brady Bunch. In another, Gary resorted to his version of "the dog ate my homework" to explain why that week's batch of cartoons was one short. He submitted a panel of an angry truck driver shaking his fist at an oblivious driver who had just cut him off. The caption reads: "Suddenly, Jake realized there



At *The Far Side*'s spy center



The art of conversation

was nothing funny about this cartoon. 'Maybe,' he murmured to himself, 'That's what's funny.' (However, a replacement cartoon would arrive on his desk Tuesday and he would breathe a tremendous sigh of relief.)"

Finally, there is a simple cartoon whose most interesting characteristic is its genesis. On Halloween night 1989, I sat on a wide windowsill in an apartment in New York City that Gary and his wife had rented while he was on sabbatical. As we talked, Gary said suddenly, "You just gave me an idea for a cartoon. It's the first idea I've had since I've been on sabbatical." Several months later, after he had returned to drawing *The Far Side*, Gary submitted a panel in which



a woman was standing in front of a man hanging in a picture frame who was prattling on about the weather. The woman is thinking, "Oh, my ... This is depressing." The cartoon's caption is "The art of conversation."



The cartoon doesn't cast me in the most flattering light, I know, but that's not something I dwell on. I prefer to think of it as an object lesson in understanding that ideas for cartoons can come from anywhere if you know where to look.

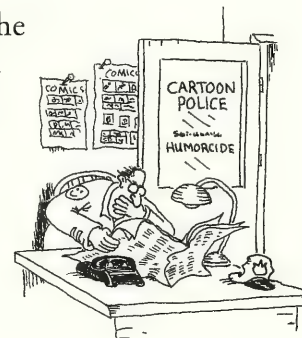
Being a cartoonist can be very solitary: just you and the Bristol board in front of you. And it's not that easy. Anyone who thinks he can get rich by producing something funny that's read every day over soggy cornflakes should buy a lottery ticket instead. There are a limited number of comic strip slots in newspapers, and many of them are filled by cartoons drawn by old men and have been around for decades. (The Web is changing this, but for many cartoonists, the newspaper is still the venue of choice.) Imagine that the only bookstore in town has a selection of just two dozen titles, some of them 70 years old, and you have a fairly accurate idea of what cartoon syndication is like: It's a very competitive business. The odds are stacked against you.

But sometimes, when newspaper editors take a chance and readers aren't looking that carefully, something a little innovative can sneak in. Day by day, panel by panel, a cartoonist with a different point of view that's clear and fresh and impertinent catches people unaware, engaging them in unexpected ways and prompting them to think a little about the world around them. A connection is forged. Gary Larson and *The Far Side* did that.

*"If by chance worse comes to worse and you don't hear from me—please just use your own judgment as far as selecting one version over another, one word over another, or repairing any of my usual grammatical errors. In other words, make me funny, Jake."*

I never made Gary Larson funny. No one did. What he created over 15 years came from someplace unique within him, a universe all his own. That is why *The Far Side* still seems fresh, still seems rare, years after the cartoons were first drawn.

All I did was save the Post-its.













## Preface

You know I'm nervous.

As I write, it's been almost seven years since I hung up my eraser. (For the record, an eraser was the most essential tool I owned.) And this is the first time, ever, that I have reviewed my own work in its entirety. I must tell you: I have seen things.

To begin with, I stumbled across a couple small mysteries herein: One cartoon appears twice, years apart, but with different captions. I have no idea what happened there, except that I strongly suspect chaos theory was involved. And another I unwittingly drew twice—again, several years apart. (No wonder I had this eerie sensation the thing was practically drawing itself.) I'm not going to identify any of the above offenders; I'm banking on you just saying “déjà vu” a couple times and moving on.

Now, that covers four cartoons—as for the remaining 4,333.

In hindsight, I realize it probably wasn't a great idea to base any cartoon on some news event, fad, expression, person, movie, TV show, or commercial that was destined to fade from everyone's memory before my ink was dry. Of course, time eventually erodes all humor, which is why you no longer hear the one about the Visigoth and the Hittite, or that old Neanderthal favorite, “Why did the Archaeopteryx cross the road?” (Actually, that last one still works for me.)

And then there are those cartoons that trigger something a friend of mine calls the What-the? Reflex. This reflex is entirely involuntary, much like the way a dead frog's leg can be made to kick with the proper stimulus. You'll see a cartoon, and “What the?” will simply burst from your voice box. (I love biology.)

Of course, there are a number of other reflexes that could be discussed (the more upsetting My God! Reflex is sure to strike on occasion), and I'm obviously hopeful that laughter is included among them. But there is only one more I wish to mention, and one I hope you encounter only rarely. Because this is the bad one. This is the one that any credible cartoonist truly fears. And it is this: the silent yawn. It seems innocuous enough, perhaps even preferred to the My God! Reflex. It is not. It is death. To bore someone—to fail to engage them on some level, good or bad (and you hope it's good), to fail to give something to them that sticks to their bones—even if they wish you hadn't—that is simply a creative effort that tanked. It's a frog's leg that not only won't kick, it won't even twitch. It's just going to lie there, cold and still. I beg you, please: Quit poking the damn thing and just move on. I'm sure a good, solid “What the?” is just around the corner.

Yes, I'm definitely nervous.

However, let me quickly add, I don't mean to sound defensive, or somehow distancing myself from anything in this book. Quite the contrary. Despite



the experiments that somehow went awry, I'm actually proud of this body of work. I'm ready to hand it in. (And, if nothing else, the other cartoonists will never call me "Skinny Books" again.)

So why, I have to ask myself, am I nervous? Well, I think it has something to do with what the cartoonist Richard Guindon once said to me when I was first starting out. We were discussing our shared, iron-clad rule of never accepting cartoon ideas from others, and Richard said, "It's like having someone write in your diary." It's an apt analogy. As I look over my 14 years of *Far Side* cartoons, what I really see are my daily "entries," my musings, my little experiments in ink. Every one of these cartoons is just something that drifted into my head when I was alone with my thoughts. And, for better or worse, I "jotted" them down. It was only later, when perhaps I received an angry letter from someone, that it struck me: Hey! Someone's been reading my diary!

Enough of my blabbering. What's done is done. I'll get out of your way. But maybe it would be helpful if I told you this: My drafting table, where I drew *The Far Side* for most of my career, faced a window that overlooked a beautiful garden; beyond the garden was a lake, and beyond the lake Mount Rainier rose majestically into the Washington sky.

I worked at night.

—Gary Larson



The Larson brothers, California (1957)

Photo by Gary's mom



## Acknowledgments

Someone once told me that no one has ever realized their goal in life without someone else having opened that first door for them. I believe it's true. (Even Jeremiah Johnson got that old geezer to show him the "ways" of the mountain.)

My Door Opener was Stan Arnold, the General Manager of Chronicle Features Syndicate. I met Stan in the summer of 1979, and in the space of about 20 minutes, while sitting in his office, I went from Gary Larson the Confused to Gary Larson the Confusing Cartoonist. (I guess Stan must have seen something in me, sort of like the way a horse trainer might recognize qualities in a two-year-old, despite the dull expression on its face.) When Stan passed away a few years ago, it was a contemplative time for me as I recalled the man who, well—there's no other way to put it—changed my life.

But if Stan Arnold opened the door to my cartooning career, I had a slew of folks who strove to keep it from swinging back shut on me.

Stuart Dodds was the lone and intrepid salesperson who first ventured forth with *The Far Side*, knocking on the office doors of newspaper editors, presenting my work, and braving their occasional shock and indignation. Believe me, in the heyday of *Nancy* and *Blondie*, what Stuart did took some chutzpah. (I've long suspected he pitched *The Far Side* wearing one of those big nose and glasses disguise.) If there was some kind of Purple Heart for syndicate salespeople, Stuart would be plastered with them.

Similarly, I must deeply thank those newspapers that did not recoil when they first saw my work. Indeed, a handful even embraced it. When you draw a cartoon that may, for example, show a nerdy kid walking toward the front of his class for "show 'n' tell," carrying a jar with a human head in it, then you definitely need some folks around you who aren't afraid to shake things up a little, or at least willing to look the other way once in a while. During the first year or two that I was drawing, these papers essentially paid my rent and kept me in ink.

And on the subject of ink, I suppose I know a little something about drawing, but when it later came to painting my work, I sat on the bench and watched as a number of artists made wonderful, often inspired, contributions to my work. I am extremely grateful to them all, but I must specifically mention Donna Oatney, the alpha artist who created the lion's share of watercolors within these two volumes. If anyone ever came close to having a mind-meld with me, it was Donna. (Frankly, I think this was starting to worry her.)

My long-time editor at Universal Press Syndicate was the invaluable Jake Morrissey. And let me say this about editors in general: Not having a good one is like doing brain surgery with a butter knife—you can do it, but you're always paranoid the other surgeons are rolling their eyes when you're not



looking. What a relief to have someone standing next to you hand you a sharp scalpel and just say, "Cut that thing, Gary! Right there! Cut it, damn you!" Thanks, Jake.

In team sports, they refer to some athletes as the "Go-To Guy." In my world, that person was Tom Thornton, the president of Andrews McMeel Publishing. Always the trusted voice of calm and reason, Tom often guided me through the Valley of Nuts, where I believe I had a tendency to sometimes linger. Moreover, you hold in your hands a book for which virtually nothing was spared when it came to quality. That's not a rollover decision for any publisher, but I've always had a playbook with just one page in it, which simply says, "Get the ball into Tom's hands."

I cannot adequately thank my wife, Toni, for her unwavering support. Even with the help of a reliable editor, it takes someone who truly cares about you, someone who can look at something you've worked really hard on, and then, with eyes full of love, gaze into your own and softly say, "That's not funny."

My sincere gratitude is extended to this book's main editors, Dorothy O'Brien and Chris Schillig, for their collective advice and feedback, and also to author/editor John Yow, for his own helpful insights.

Early on in the process of making this book, someone at my publisher warned me that there was no avoiding some screwup or two in the final product. Too many layers to this thing, they said, and the glitch gnomes are always out in force. Probably true, but I immediately decided to haul out my secret weapon: a human microscope who is fondly known around here as Kate "The Eye" Gentry. You can stand outside The Eye's office when she's proofreading and hear those glitch gnomes scream for their lives. It's a lovely sound.

Now rumor has it that this book's designer and guiding force, Michael Reagan (not the son of a former president; the son of a ship fitter), having wrestled for three years with this project's enormous complexities (and one Mother Hen cartoonist), may have gone insane just as *The Complete Far Side* went to press. But I hope you'll agree, Michael went out in glory. (And should the rumor prove true, I certainly intend to swing by on occasion and express my deep thanks to him during visiting hours.)

And finally, of course, I must thank you. I found myself so often in hot water when my work crossed some invisible line, I intermittently thought, "Well, that was fun while it lasted." The Humor Police, it seems, are always hovering around; I just didn't know you were out there as well. Boy, did you guys save my butt on more than one occasion. My gratitude knows no bounds.

I would also like to thank Jeremiah Johnson.



## Production Note

It all started simply enough: I received a call from Tom Thornton, the president of Andrews McMeel, in November of 2000, asking if I would be interested in working on the final *Far Side* book. It would include everything Gary had done during the 14 years *The Far Side* was in syndication, over 4,300 cartoons. I was a big fan so it was not a difficult decision.

I had never met Gary, so we set up a meeting a few weeks later to initiate a relationship that, as we both realized, would need to work effectively for the next three years. After all, this would be Gary's legacy book, and he was very serious about having it done right. In person, I found Gary to be surprisingly shy and modest; he does not try to impress you with his brilliance or overwhelm you with his ego. However, under that low-key, mild-mannered appearance is indeed a man of steel. Gary is ferocious in guarding against mediocrity and a perfectionist about his art. We have had endless discussions and generated a zillion e-mails about things like commas, italics, em dashes, and word choice—and that was just for the captions. When it came to reproducing the drawings or creating new ones—those black lines that make up the world Gary lives in—well, suffice it to say that Gary is unrelenting when it comes to making his work as good as it can be. (You can probably see why it did not stay simple for very long.)

But who can blame him? *The Far Side* was unique; there has never been anything quite like it, before or since. Maybe the timing was right. The first *Far Side* cartoon appeared in 1980, the year we elected Ronald Reagan. And over the next 14 years, a steady diet of hilarious abnormality was maybe just what the world needed. Or maybe a steady diet of bizarre genius was simply what the comics page needed—a riotous upheaval in a land where change comes glacially slow.

For whatever reason, *The Far Side* rocked the world. It became a cultural phenomenon. People didn't simply read *The Far Side*; they reacted to it, often with strange passion. On that first visit to Seattle, I was flabbergasted when Toni, Gary's wife, showed me a room full of boxes filled with letters that Gary and his publisher had received over the years. A room full. A lot of it was fan mail, of course, but there was an amazing amount of hate mail, much of it suggesting that Gary was a very sick person and should be put away, or at the very least barred from the comics page.

Not surprisingly, given the odd animals, insects, microbes, aliens, and humans that populate the panel, there were also thousands of letters from readers pointing out some mistake or other. Another large category consisted of letters from people who generally liked *The Far Side* but felt that in the case of a specific cartoon, Gary had gone too far and had offended them. In other words, as long as he poked fun at someone else, Gary's work was great. Looking back through all the cartoons, I've concluded that over the years he has been very evenhanded and managed to offend nearly every group.

But more than that, of course, what the letters show is that Gary engaged his readers—perhaps more than any cartoonist before or since. The response he stirred in the heart and mind of his audience—whether outrage, dismay, wonder, or hilarity—constitutes the necessary other half of the *Far Side* experience.

One last thing: You will probably notice that we organized the book in chronological order, but not rigidly. In the end, this is a book about images and at times the design overruled a strict chronology.

I hope you enjoy your journey into *The Far Side* as much as I have. Buckle up—it's going to be a wild ride.

—Michael Reagan